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Egypt's Mood Turns Against Close U.S. Ties

EXCERPTED

The anti-American sentiment appears to have become a factor in the foreign policy calculations of Mubarak, who is sensitive to the public mood.

For example, he has gone out of his way to project a new image of Egyptian nonalignment and to play down Egypt's close association with the United States, particularly on national security.

Little is said any longer by officials of either country about joint strategic planning or of the military and intelligence links between the two governments. The main focus of their cooperation appears to have switched from Middle East peace talks and contingency planning for Persian Gulf security to Egypt's more immediate problems: Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi, who seems bent on stirring trouble for the Mubarak government, and Sudan's ailing President Jaafar Nimeri, whose regime faces a spreading armed rebellion backed by neighboring Ethiopia and Libya.

A rare visible sign of an apparently continuing close military cooperation in these matters surfaced last March when, in response to a bombing attack on Khartoum, the Sudanese capital, by a Libyan warplane, U.S. transport planes helped fly Egyptian air-defense equipment to Sudan.

The United States also has sent Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) intelligence-gathering aircraft here at least twice since Mubarak came into office to help Egypt keep tabs on Libya. In addition, there were reports in mid-1983 that the United States had established a secret contingency air base in Egypt that could be used for the AWACS and support of fighter squadrons "in certain contingencies."

These all seem to suggest that what has happened to Egyptian-U.S. cooperation in the military and intelligence fields is that it has "gone underground" but still remains extensive and is probably increasing, especially where Libya and Sudan are concerned.

— David B. Ottaway